

Meet Chef Will Serafini

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Get to know one of the great people behind the food. Interview with Eataly Chicago's Executive Chef Will Serafini

When did you know you wanted to be a chef?

I have been around food my whole life, starting with rolling meatballs and breading mozzarella sticks in my dad's restaurant when I was around seven or eight. I loved sneaking handfuls of garbanzo beans from the cooler. My dad was my first introduction to the restaurant world, but my mom is the reason I love food and cooking. She is a phenomenal cook who always managed to get really good meals on the table for six kids on a nightly basis. Watching her is where I saw the true satisfaction that comes with creating something purely for others to enjoy.

But it took me a few years (almost seven) of sitting in a cubicle, putting off creating PowerPoint presentations and Excel sheets in favor of reading about food, researching recipes and new restaurants. I'm very practical and analytical, so it took some time before I would let myself follow my passion.

**Did you train at an institute?**

I attended Kendall College (of culinary arts) in Chicago.

Tell us about your past professional experience.

We can skip over the part where I worked at an advertising/marketing agency, selling Disney dreams and ice-cold beer, and get to the fun cooking part ([Rob Wing](#) [2], former executive chef of Eataly Chicago, will tell you I was a banker; just go along with him).

With little experience under my belt, I was fortunate to earn a position at Spiaggia Restaurant, a fine-dining Italian establishment in Chicago headed up by Tony Mantuano. There, my eyes were opened to what it meant to really cook true Italian cuisine. I learned how to utilize some of the best products around, got to work with some rare Italian ingredients, and was taught restraint in order to know when to let the ingredients speak for themselves. I was also lucky enough to work with and learn a great deal from [Sam De Los Santos](#) [3] (now Executive Chef at Eataly Boston).

After Spiaggia, I wanted to get some different perspective so I did a complete 180 and went to Longman & Eagle, a Michelin-starred whiskey bar in Chicago. Longman was great because we were still sourcing and using the best local ingredients around to put out high-quality food but in a super fun and casual environment where we worked hard and played hard. Some of the dishes there have a very unique approach to food and utilize some great modern cooking techniques. It was a very useful educational contrast to what I learned at Spiaggia.

Joining Eataly Chicago in December 2014 seemed like a natural fit, and it has been an awesome job so far!

What is your specialty Italian dish?

It's probably a little obvious to say – but I enjoy cooking pasta. My two favorite dishes to cook are a simple and basic Genovese pesto with potato gnocchi and pappardelle with a beef shank ragù. The marrow from the beef shank melts into the sauce, making it is so rich and gluttonous.

What ingredients are you craving the most right now?

I cannot wait until local corn starts popping up towards the end of summer. Most people would say it's such a simple and basic ingredient, but it's really versatile and fun to transform. Don't get me wrong: it is great grilled whole and slathered in butter with lime and chili.

The next answer is tomatoes. Good farm-fresh tomatoes have such a short season, and it's always a sad day when our local farmers deliver the last harvest. Plus, it means the cold weather isn't too far off here in Chicago!

Do you have any quirks that your team teases you about?

I talk to myself constantly when I am really trying to focus on a task, knock out a lot of prep, or get through a big rush. I know it drives people crazy because they are always asking me, "What?" and looking at me sideways.

If you weren't a chef, what profession would you have?

If we are talking anything-goes-dream-scenario, I would be a professional soccer player in the English Premier League – umm, I mean the Italian Serie A. Or I would be a fishing boat captain for Chefs Rob and Sam (mentioned above).

Tell us a behind-the-counter secret about Eataly!

All of our traditional sit-down restaurants feature hand-shaped pastas on their menus, made in-house at our [fresh pasta counter](#) [4] daily.

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